

Decisiveness in the Field

Decisiveness is the product of experience, preparation, focus, patience, and anticipation. Many opportunities come and go in a flash with only those who are decisive able to take advantage of them. My speaking career brings me in contact with many successful businessmen and it is surprising how often they tell me, "Karl this business wasn't the plan starting out, but I saw a need as an opportunity and reacted before anyone else did". In other words they were decisive and a successful business was their reward.

My youngest son Jeff turned ten years old last year, so I decided it was time to introduce him to bird hunting which is one of my passions. His Labrador retriever was inexperienced too, so I thought it would be fun to bring them out to Kiowa Creek, a local hunting club, and let them learn together in a controlled environment hunting pen raised birds. Jeff hadn't earned his hunters safety card yet so he would be carrying his BB gun. His dog Rocket had been through this drill a few times before with me, but this was Jeff's first experience hunting.

We drove up to the training field we were going to hunt, and met Jim who worked at Kiowa Creek. I had paid for six pheasants and six quail down at the clubhouse, so they were in cages in the back of Jim's pickup. I showed Jeff the gaudy rooster pheasants and the camouflaged tan hens. He liked the little masked bob white quail in the other cage. I explained to him that these and any holdover birds from previous hunts would be our targets. If we were alert, and followed Rocket's lead, we would have a chance to bring some home for dinner.

Jim started placing the game birds in different cover throughout the large Milo field we were going to hunt. It was a dirty field meaning that they didn't treat it with herbicides to kill the weeds, so it offered great cover and food for the holdover birds that were smart enough to avoid earlier hunters and the ever present coyotes and owls. They had cut the field into five fifteen yard wide strips that were a quarter of a mile long. I set up an empty water bottle for Jeff to practice shooting with his BB gun while we waited for Jim to set out the birds. Jeff plinked the water bottle a few times knocking it flying. Then something happened that should have warned me about the rest of the hunt.

Jim's pickup spooked a herd of five mule deer from the field as he drove to the next spot he was going to hide a bird. The deer passed us one hundred yards away and they were pronging, which is a peculiar gait when mule deer bounce on all four feet at once like they're hopping on a pogo stick. This was too much for Jeff. He had a gun; we were hunting, so he took off running after the deer. "Wait, wait Jeff, where are you going?" I hollered too him. "Remember the pheasants and the quail? You don't have a deer license and it's not deer season anyway." Jeff calmed down and Jim soon finished placing the birds and drove away.

I got my shotgun and Rocket out of the Suburban and it was finally time to hunt. Rocket zig zagged through the first strip of milo at high speed, drinking in the smells of other dogs, bird roosts, and piles of feathers where owls or coyotes had killed birds that past hunters had missed. Jeff tried to follow Rocket but because of the wet spring the milo and weeds were as tall as he was in much of the field. The dry

stalks and leaves hit him in the face and eyes making it difficult for him to see anything so I moved him outside the heavy stuff into the cut strip. He was to watch me and walk along at the same speed I moved through the milo. I moved slowly allowing the dog to work through the thick cover and a few times could tell that she was hot on a birds trail when her tail gyrated and she quickly changed direction with her nose to the ground.

Ten minutes into this Jeff was getting bored. I was moving too slow. He was on the outside of the cover and not tall enough to see Rocket work. All he'd shot so far was a water bottle. He trudged along with his head down until he saw a small prickly pear cactus in the field. "Dad, can I shoot this cactus?" he asked me. "Sure Jeff," I replied, not too happy about cactus in a dog training field, and realizing he was bored. Pttt, his BB gun fired and Jeff was thrilled by the "unearthly green blood" that came out of the plant. He trudged along some more doing a good job of keeping pace with me while Rocket and I worked the cover looking for birds. Rocket's tail started gyrating again indicating a bird was about when Jeff asked, "Dad would you shoot a snake in the head or in the middle?" Preoccupied by Rocket's renewed enthusiasm and expecting her to go on point at any moment I replied, "In the head I suppose". Pttt Jeff fired his BB gun again which sent me running through the weeds and milo to him. "Did you see a snake son", I blurted. The area we were hunting holds a few rattlesnakes. "No, but I think this hole is a snake hole dad so I shot down it". We finished the row with no birds flushed. On the way back down the next strip Jeff shot a spider and was impressed by the hole his BB made in the ground with eight legs still wiggling around it. Rocket bumped a quail in her hurry and I shot it. She later pointed two quail but while I was trying to get Jeff's attention they flushed and I shot another one.

Near the end of our two hours in the field Jeff was tuckered out and walking along with his head down. He heard something in front of him and looked up to see a dozen pheasants running just ahead of him on the outside edge of the cover. He pulled his gun up and yelled "there they go" which flushed the birds. Instead of picking out an individual bird and aiming at it he shot a random BB harmlessly in the flock's direction as they flew off.

How often do we all miss opportunities because we lose focus due to distractions or the monotony of day to day life? I was able to keep my focus in the field because I am an experienced hunter and was able to read the signs the dog was giving me. I bagged two quail during our hunt. Even though Jeff wanted to be successful he grew bored quickly and was distracted by unimportant details like deer running around and snake holes. He knew what we were after but hadn't prepared in his mind, anticipating what to do when his opportunity finally came. Because of his lack of experience his tools were limited, but later, when talking about what he could have done when the pheasants ran out in front of him, he told me he should have stayed quiet, picked out one bird to aim at, and quickly shot it on the ground. Had he thought this through ahead of time he would have been decisive and very likely successful. Jeff was thinking right but it was too late. Anticipate your opportunities and be decisive when they come in order to be successful.

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